

Indiana Artisans

~by Jessica Gall

You may have seen the symbol at a local gallery, the Indiana State Fair, or even in a gift store at the airport and wondered what it meant. Eric Freeman hopes more and more people will be quick to recognize and seek out the blue circle with the yellow flame in the middle surrounded by the words "Indiana Artisan," denoting the program he spearheads for the state.

"This really is an economic development program," says Freeman, program director of the Indiana Artisan project, which is a joint venture of the Indiana Office of Tourism Development, the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, the Indiana Arts Commission, and the Indiana State Department of Agriculture. "The primary goal is to help the artisans develop their businesses."

"We asked the artisans, 'What is it you need to learn to improve your business?'" Freeman says. From the artists' input Freeman and his staff developed workshops on how to sell art, how to price one's work, how to professionally photograph that work, how to make a business plan, and more.

Started in 2008, the Indiana Artisan program has been promoting a growing number of artists and food producers throughout the Hoosier state. Currently there are 86 artists from 41 of Indiana's



92 counties, and an October jury will bring in even more. The program was inspired by other supporting-the-local-arts ventures in Kentucky, North Carolina, and West Virginia.

In February of 2010 Indiana Artisans will have its first annual marketplace in Indianapolis where consumers can go to one place and purchase art and food from any participating artisan.

Greg Schatz, a potter from Nashville who entered the program in 2008, is looking forward to the marketplace. "I think that's very exciting," he says. "There are still a lot of artists who are not aware of the Indiana Artisan program.... I think it's still making its way through the art and the food community, and as it grows the public will become more aware of it."

Although the program is still in its infancy, Indiana Artisan has already attracted some of the highest quality artists in the state. Participants must go through a selective jury process (the acceptance rate is 17 percent) and then agree to attend a mandatory workshop and put the blue and yellow logo on their work.

Indiana Artisans produce a wide variety of art, from traditional paintings, pottery, and photography to mosaics

made from recycled goods, musical instruments, and more. Additionally, "value-added food products," meaning, according to program guidelines, that the food or drink "has been modified or enhanced for the consumer beyond its raw form," are also part of the program. Wine, beer, chocolates, ice cream, cookies, breads, syrups, jams, and other drool-inducing products grace the list.

Freeman hopes the program continues to grow because he believes Indiana has a lot of quality art to offer the world.

"Hoosiers tend to be modest people who don't really value their own work as much as they should," he says. "We have some very, very high quality national level artisans in this state." For an example Freeman cites Rising Sun harp makers William and Pamela Rees, who sell more products to customers in Europe than in the United States.

Brown County weaver Chris Gustin became an Indiana Artisan in October of 2008 and ever since has been pushing fellow artists to get involved, especially for the notoriety attached to the statewide program. "It definitely doesn't hurt to have that logo on my weaving that says this is quality work," she says. Currently Brown County has more official Indiana Artisans than any other county with 14, while Monroe County is not far behind with 10.

The success of the program in this area of the state does not surprise Freeman. "What Brown County has is an arts culture, and it really is part of the fabric in Brown County that I don't think is matched in any other county in the state," he says. "What I think Monroe County has is not so much the arts culture but it has an arts community. And I think that's driven largely by IU; it attracts younger people and its more hip," he says.

Freeman hopes the Indiana Artisan program will turn more of the state into art-supportive communities, similar to Brown and Monroe counties.

Continued on 16

INDIANA ARTISANS cont'd from 10

"One of the goals of this program is to tell those stories so Hoosiers understand that we've got some fine, fine artisans in this state," he says. With the early success of the program don't be surprised to see that Indiana Artisan logo popping up at another artist near you.

In 2008, the State of Indiana awarded \$85,000 in grants to eight groups around the state to develop and promote artisan trails where art lovers and the curious can visit multiple art enterprises in one trip. "We're driving the market to the artisans," says Freeman, program manager for the Indiana Artisan program that helped administer the grants. Freeman sees the artisan trails as a way to bring the community closer to artists so they can "meet them, see them do their work and ultimately buy their work."

The Columbus, Bloomington, and Brown County Convention and Visitors Bureaus combined forces to secure \$10,000 to create a trail through Bartholomew, Brown, and Monroe counties. The Twisted Trail, as this route is called, winds its way through the rolling hills of southern Indiana on 40 miles of State Road 46. Many of the stops are at the studios of official Indiana Artisans, although there are other artists on the path as well. Twisted Trail followers will find beautiful art, architecture, galleries, museums, food and drink, and more along the path.

In addition to the Twisted Trail, the Limestone Trail wanders through Monroe and Lawrence counties and the River of Glass Trail includes stops in both Bartholomew and Marion counties.

For questions about the Indiana Artisan program and to see a map of various trails visit the Web site at <www.in.gov/indianaartisan/> or contact Eric Freeman, program manager, at <artisan@iac.in.gov> or (317) 607-8715. Online applications for the next jury are due on Oct. 10, 2009.■